

***ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS***

*In accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts General laws, Chapter 30A, Section 20, notice is hereby given for the following meeting of the:*

***Arlington School Committee  
School Committee Special Meeting  
Tuesday, May 24, 2016  
7:00 PM***

*Arlington School Committee Sponsored  
Forum to Discuss Middle School Configuration at Gibbs  
Dedicated 6th Grade or 6th-8th Grade*

*Robbins Town Hall Auditorium  
730 Mass Avenue  
Arlington, MA*

*7:00 PM Open Meeting, Jennifer Susse, Chair*

*7:05 PM Remarks, Kathleen Bodie. Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools*

*7:15 PM Presentation by Ottoson Teachers*

*7:30 PM Public Comment*

***Adjournment***

*The listings of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair; which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.*

*Stated times and time amounts, listed in parenthesis, are the estimated amount of time for that particular agenda item. Actual times may be shorter or longer depending on the time needed to fully explore the topic.*

*Submitted by Jennifer Susse, Chair*



## Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

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7:05 PM Remarks, Kathleen Bodie. Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools

### ATTACHMENTS:

Type	File Name	Description
▢	Recommendations Kathleen_Bodie_s_Recommendation_Gibbs_Configuration__5_12_2016.pdf	Kathleen Bodie's Recommendation Gibbs Configuration



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*May 12, 2016*

To: School Committee

From: Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D.

Re: Recommendation Gibbs Configuration

My recommendation to the School Committee is that the Gibbs School be configured for sixth grade only. The rationale for my recommendation is based on a number of considerations:

- Having all sixth grade students together in their own school presents a unique opportunity for students from seven elementary schools to come together as a class in an environment that can be organized for their needs as they transition from elementary to middle school. Presently, the sixth grade schedule must conform to the schedule that works for all grades at OMS.
- The choice of a sixth grade only school rather than 6-8 grade school eliminates the potential for inequity between two unevenly sized 6-8 grade middle schools.
- Sixth grade students would benefit socially-and emotionally in this key transition year by being in a more personalized learning environment in which there is a narrower age range of students. There is a notable difference between sixth and eighth grade students - that difference in a school can both be beneficial and detrimental.
- A positive result of bringing all students from seven elementary schools together in the middle school is that students will find new friends among the larger pool of students who have similar interests. If there are two smaller middle schools, then the opportunity to meet all of the students in your grade cohort is deferred until high school. Many students know and are friends with students from other schools through the various town activities they have participated in during their elementary years, which is only an asset in the development of class cohort identity. This identity could be better nurtured in a smaller learning environment.
- Research regarding the potential detrimental effect of transitions on academic performance focuses on individual students moving from school to school or district to district. In this situation, the sixth grade would move as a cohort, which would mitigate the effect of moving to another building because they are moving with their friends. The impact of transitions can be prevented by thoughtful planning and communication

*An Equal Opportunity School System with a High Commitment to Diversity*

between the schools. The experience in Needham is that the sixth grade only school provides strong support for students as they transition from elementary school to middle school. The transition to seventh grade is smooth because of the communication and thoughtful planning that occurs between the two schools.

- The Gibbs School is a much more navigable school than Ottoson Middle School, which is a challenging environment for incoming sixth grade students who are transitioning from smaller elementary schools. If the decision was to configure Gibbs as a 6-8 grade school, then two-thirds of the each incoming sixth grade would still experience the challenge of the labyrinthine Ottoson as they adjust to the other challenges of entering middle school.
- Smaller schools encourage a feeling of community, which is important in supporting a positive school culture. In the sixth grade configuration, all sixth grade students would experience a smaller learning environment.
- The incremental costs of a sixth grade school are about half those of replicating a 6-8 grade school primarily because of the number of programs that must be replicated for equity.



## Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

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### 7:15 PM Presentation by Ottoson Teachers

#### ATTACHMENTS:

Type	File Name	Description
▣ Report	OMSExpansionReport_4_12_2016_(4).pdf	OMS Expansion Report 4 12 2016
▣ Presentation	Growing_Pains.pdf	Growing Pains

# Report on the Results of the OMS Expansion Teacher Survey

4/14/16

Prepared by:

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Jason Levy

Heather Mahoney

Judith Packer

Alecia Serafini

Anne Zachary

# Report on the Results of the OMS Expansion Teacher Survey

## I. Introduction:

On March 8, 2016 Dr. Bodie led a presentation for OMS staff that centered upon the enrollment growth the district will be experiencing over the next ten years. As a means of meeting this enrollment challenge Dr. Bodie provided three space options for OMS staff to discuss in small mixed-disciplinary groups. These three options included:

- Building an addition onto the existing OMS structure.
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a single school grade (6th).
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a smaller 6, 7, 8 middle school.

Following Dr. Bodie's presentation feedback forms were gathered from each group and an anonymous Google survey pertaining to the space options was disseminated to individual staff. Out of a possible 100 respondents 75 responded to the survey. The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

- 14 responders from the 6th grade
- 8 responders from 7th grade
- 10 responders from the 8th grade
- 30 responders from "Out of Cluster" staff
- 13 responders from Special Education

## Overall Findings:

The overall recommendation of the faculty was to renovate and re-open the Gibbs school. A majority of those in favor of this option also voted for the adoption of a single grade 6th model at the Gibbs. The overall findings from the survey also appeared to be relatively aligned to feedback forms obtained from the mixed-disciplinary discussions that occurred following Dr. Bodie's March 8, 2016 presentation to OMS staff regarding enrollment challenges.

## II. Analysis of Findings by Grade/Discipline

### 6th Grade Analysis:

A significant number of 6th grade teachers (10/14, 71.4%) voted to reopen the Gibbs for a 6th grade only school. Based on survey data, formal discussion groups, and informal conversations, the primary rationale is the ability to specifically tailor a 6th grade program to the unique needs of 6th grade students. Many teachers feel clusters and class sizes have grown too large, and the time in the schedule we used to have (MSSR, Cluster Time, Directed Study,

SOAR), has been replaced with an additional teaching section. Another side effect of moving from four sections to five is the fact that there is now no period in the day when all students from a particular cluster are “in-cluster” (in math, science, history or ELA) at the same time. There is always a population in an “out of cluster” class.

This has inhibited teachers’ ability to nurture 6th grade students, ease the transition to middle school, or even get to know them well. As it stands now, there is very little difference between the experience of a 6th grader and that of a 7th or 8th grader, even though they are a unique population with different needs.

There remain concerns about this option, both from the people who voted for it, and the people who voted for the other choices (3/14, 21.4% for 6/7/8 at Gibbs, 1/14, 7.1% for OMS Addition). Among them is the loss of vertical integration within departments. 6th grade teachers already wish they were more able to communicate with 5th grade, and are concerned about the loss of communication with 7th as well. 6th grade teachers are also concerned about adding a second school transition; while a 6th grade school may ease the transition between 5th and 6th grade, adding a second transition from 6th to 7th grade may have negative consequences for our neediest populations, such as students with disabilities.

Another concern is the effect on special education. Inclusion and co-taught are grade specific, but the Supported Learning Centers serve grades 6 - 8. Grade 6 would need full time staff for Reach, Summit, Compass and their related services (SLP, OT, SW). If there is a commitment to providing this level of staffing, 6th grade teachers feel better about this option.

Teachers were also asked which their least favorite choice was. 6/14, or 42.9%, listed a 6/7/8. 8/14, or 57.1%, listed an OMS addition as their last choice. Teachers are mostly concerned about the overwhelming size of Ottoson already. There is a concern about unsupervised spaces and crowded shared spaces such as gyms and the cafeteria. Teachers who are against the 6/7/8 school are worried about equity of demographics and resources between the two schools.

6th grade teachers strongly believe that our participation is vital in shaping a 6th grade program that fits the needs of our students, should that be the final decision. We also stress that in the event of a 6/7/8, transfers should be voluntary if possible.

#### 7th Grade Analysis:

Eight 7th grade teachers participated in the survey. Of those, five voted for a 6th grade school and three voted for a 6/7/8 at the Gibbs. No 7th grade teachers selected an OMS addition as their first choice. In fact, seven out of the eight teachers selected an OMS addition as their last choice, with one listing a 6/7/8 as their least preferred option.



Most teachers believed their choice provided the best environment for teaching and learning and created a sense of community and belonging. All five teachers who voted for a 6th grade school cited these two reasons. All of the votes for a 6/7/8 credited it with creating the best environment, and two of the three voiced that it would create a sense of community.

One concern that was raised, which was unique to the 7th grade, was that a 6th grade school at Gibbs may not allow 6th graders to take 7th grade math, an opportunity around 20 students currently have.

Similar to other subgroups, 7th grade teachers believe a voluntary transfer is ideal.

#### 8th Grade Analysis:

Eleven eighth grade teachers filled out the space study survey. Of those, nine voted for opening the Gibbs as a 6th grade only school, one voted for opening the Gibbs as a second middle school, and one person voted for an addition at the Ottoson. Of the reasons cited for supporting a 6th grade school providing the environment most conducive to teaching and learning, and strengthening student/teacher relationships to support the needs of students were highest rated. Other comments included that a single grade school would be more equitable than two middle schools, lower costs, and a chance to remediate areas of need in a smaller setting before moving to the middle school where the schedule is more rigid. Major concerns with this model included the impact on special education, exploratory classes, and extracurricular activities.

Last choice was fairly evenly split, with 5 most opposed to an Ottoson addition and 4 most opposed to a 6-8 school at Gibbs. One person voted a 6th grade school as their least preferred option. Multiple write in comments against the idea of an addition mentioned that a larger school violated the middle school model and needs of young adolescents. There was also fear of declining neighborhood relations if the school expanded and the loss of green space. Equity was the major concern with ideas two schools.

Regardless of the chosen proposal, 8th grade teachers felt strongly that teacher should be involved in the design and technology planning and that transfers should be voluntary.

One comment proposed a different scenario- that the Gibbs should be opened as an 8th grade only school, with the rationale that older students could better handle the commute and transitions, and that 8th graders are ready for more responsibility and giving them their own building could be a step toward high school.

#### "Out of Cluster" Analysis:

30 “Out of Cluster” teachers took the survey. This group includes World Language, Art, Music, Technology and Engineering, Digital Media Literacy, Family and Consumer Science, Reading, Physical Education, Math Support, and more. Of the 30 responders, 22 chose a Sixth Grade school at the Gibbs as their first choice. Five supported an addition at OMS and three supported a 6-8 middle school at the Gibbs.

Most of the teachers who chose a sixth grade school cited the ability to tailor a program specifically to sixth graders as one of their key motivations. Other reasons included the benefits of a smaller environment, strengthening teacher/student relationships, Support for high quality teaching and innovation, and improving the sense of community and collegiality.

There were concerns for this model. The impact on out of cluster classes was a primary thought, with 16/22 people. Other concerns were the impact on extra-curriculars, unequal distribution of resources, and impact on special education. In our committee meetings, one concern brought up by many was the fear among “out of cluster” teachers that people would have to travel between buildings if Ottoson splits into two schools. One write-in comment said that having a sixth grade school would hinder students’ abilities to feel established in the building.

Least choice results were split between an OMS addition and a second middle school with 13 votes each and 4 votes for the 6th grade only model. Those against the building cited stress on teacher/student relationships in a large building and challenges to teaching and learning in such a large space. Those against the second middle school cited it would work contrary to students’ sense of belonging. Write in comments mentioned space limitations at both the Ottoson and the Gibbs, competition or unequal resources between the two schools, and challenges in students interacting with other grades in grade level or two-grade buildings.

Most responders indicated that allowing staff to volunteer for changes in position was key, as was allowing teachers to be part of designing of the new building or addition and school plan.

#### Special Education Analysis:

Unlike all the other subgroups, the majority of special education teachers voted for a 6/7/8 school at the Gibbs. They responded that this provides the environment that is most conducive not only to the cognitive needs of students, but their social/emotional needs as well. 8/13 (61.5%) of special educators who responded to the survey listed “strengthened student/teacher relationships will support the social/emotional/cognitive needs of students” as a primary reason for their choice. Of these eight, five voted for a 6/7/8 school at the Gibbs.

Additionally, special educators are concerned about the ability to maintain communication across grade levels. Eight out of nine teachers who voted for a 6/7/8 at Gibbs listed vertical and horizontal collaboration between staff as a primary reason.

Special educators voted a single 6th grade school as their least favorite choice, by a narrow margin (6/13, or 46%, vs 5/13, or 38%, against an OMS addition). Two selected a 6/7/8 at Gibbs as their third choice. Five out of the six teachers who oppose a 6th grade school cite “works contrary to the belief of community and sense of belonging” as a rationale. They are also concerned that a 6th grade school may limit educational service delivery.

Special education teachers overwhelmingly (12/13 responses) believe a voluntary transfer system is key to a successful implementation of either Gibbs option. A majority also supports teacher participation in the design of the programming and a communication protocol for maintaining a similar experience to the one being provided at Ottoson.

### III. Conclusion

Teachers at the Ottoson are grateful to have been included in the discussions about our future and eager to continue to play a role in this conversation. Whichever choice is made, the staff at OMS wants to be involved in this massive change so we can best educate the middle school students of Arlington.

Overall the staff opposes the idea of making the Ottoson bigger. Limitations of space on the site, the idea of eliminating green space, challenges in parking and traffic all make this building addition challenging. More importantly, students need smaller schools so they can develop relationships with staff and feel like part of the community not a cog in a machine.

It is the belief of the majority of the faculty that the best route forward for our students would be to renovate the Gibbs as a sixth grade only school. There are a few concerns with this model that still need to be alleviated, particularly how it will affect high-need special education students, but we believe that by starting the conversation early we can resolve most issues before the new building is open.

The background of the entire slide is a close-up photograph of a red brick wall. The bricks are arranged in a traditional running bond pattern, with varying shades of red and orange. A large, solid maroon square is centered on the wall, containing the title and subtitle text.

# Growing Pains

Ottoson Faculty  
Expansion Survey  
Results

# Where we are:

Ottoson is nearly double the recommended middle school size.

5th/6th largest in the state

Over building capacity

No more full-school assemblies

Fully scheduled gym and crowded cafe

# How this affects students:

Teachers will have to share classrooms (traveling teachers on carts)

Declining teacher/student relationships

Infrastructure stress- kitchen, plumbing, heat, etc.

Large class sizes mean less one-to-one time for students

Increasing incidents of bullying/misbehavior in crowded halls and cafeteria

# What we've been doing:

Following reports from Building Task Force and School Committee Meetings

Many informal lunchtime and hallway conversations throughout process

Faculty meeting presentation and group discussions of options

Individual survey about preferences

Site visit to High Rock School in Needham (grade 6 only exemplar)

Five teachers and two administrators

Teachers submitted questions which were answered in a shared GoogleDoc

Observational ppt shared with staff and further discussion in the works



# 6th grade teachers responses :

## Positive Aspects of 6th Grade School

Schedule tailored for needs of sixth grade students

Opportunity for smaller clusters and more time with students

Opportunity for 6th grade teachers to take leadership roles in creating and implementing the vision, schedule, etc.

## Concerns about a 6/7/8th Grade School

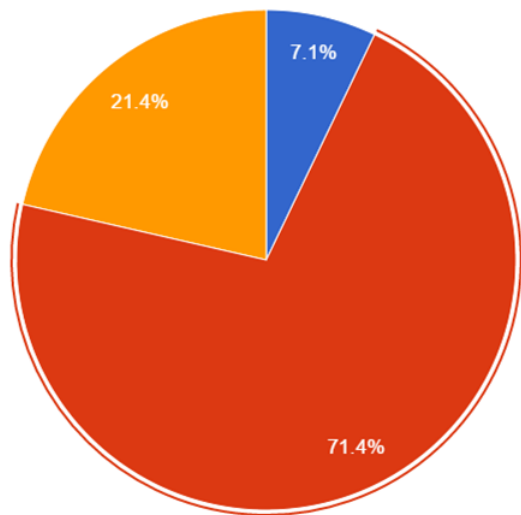
“Separate but equal”

Danger of comparing/contrasting Gibbs vs. OMS

## Concerns about expanding OMS

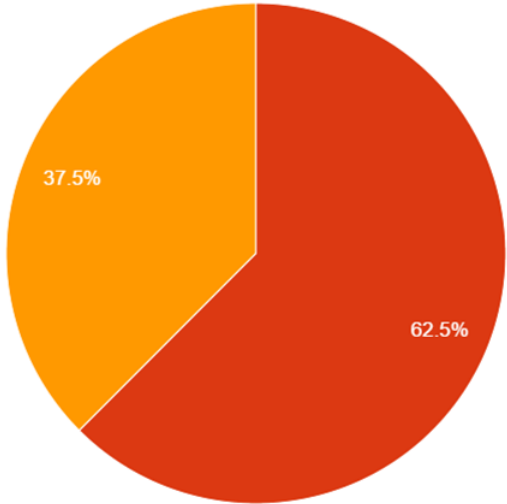
OMS is already too big with too many infrastructure issues

Logistics: removing outdoor space, possible blasting



- Building an addition onto existing OMS structure.
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a single school grade (6th)
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a smaller 6,7,8 middle school.

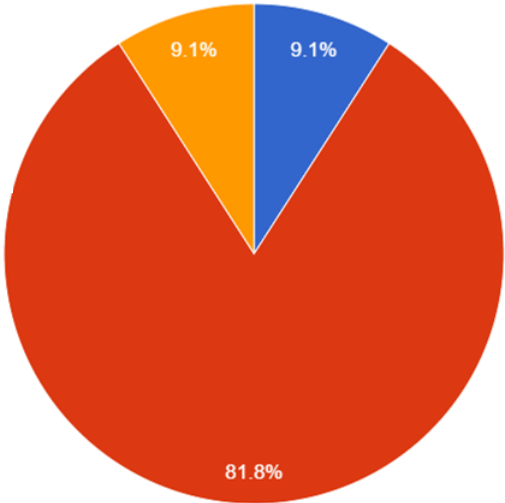
# 7th grade teacher responses:



Rationale: sense of community and belonging, strengthened relationships, support for social/emotional needs

Concerns: Impact on cluster classes (including 6th graders who take 7th grade math), impact on staff relationships (particularly the ability to communicate as a department across 6 - 7 - 8)

# 8th grade teacher responses:



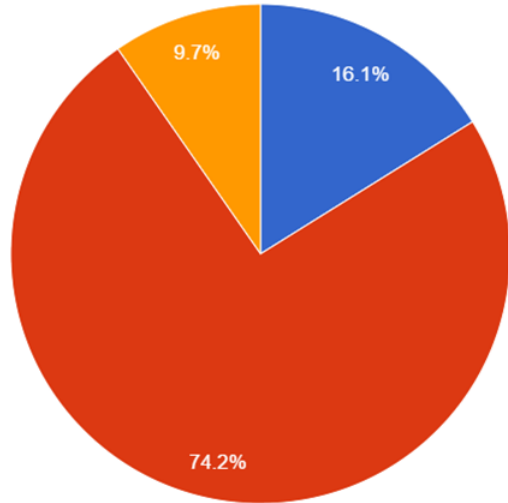
Rationale: most conducive to healthy learning environment, strengthened relationships, support for social/emotional needs

Concerns: Impact on cluster classes, special education, specialists, and extracurricular activities



# “Out of Cluster” teacher responses:

Major reasons supporting a 6th grade school at Gibbs  
(in order of significance):



- Building an addition onto existing OMS structure.
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a single school grade (6th)
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a smaller 6,7,8 middle school.

Tailoring of program to specific needs of 6th graders

Small environment most conducive to teaching,  
learning, and student needs

Strengthening of student/teacher relationships

Support of high quality teaching, innovation and risk-  
taking

Engendering a sense of community

Improvement of staff collegiality

# Special Ed teacher responses:

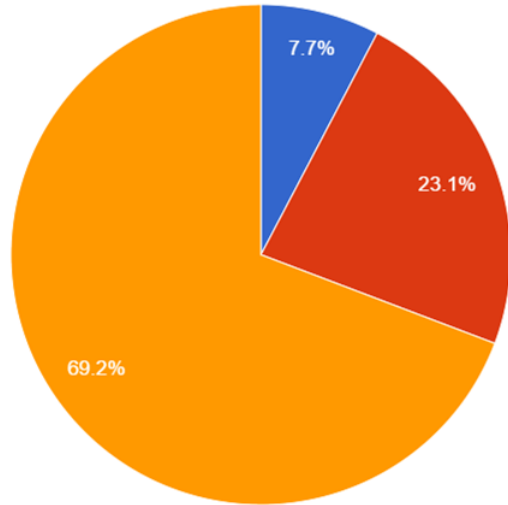
ONLY group to prefer two 6-8 schools

## Rationale:

Avoid two transitions in two years, which could be problematic for students with anxiety or other social/emotional challenges  
Create a sense of community and belonging, assist vertical integration, provide best environment for learning  
Strengthened teacher/student relationships and support for social/emotional needs to have teachers for 3 years  
Fear that small numbers of students at 6th grade school might result in programs being combined or watered down

## Concerns:

Equitable distribution of resources



- Building an addition onto existing OMS structure.
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a single school grade (6th)
- Renovating the Gibbs to house a smaller 6,7,8 middle school.

# Overall recommendations:

Take OMS expansion off the table, please. Not in best interests of students.

Gibbs preference would be a grade 6 school as long as concerns are addressed

If this model, should be a **SIXTH GRADE SCHOOL** not a mini-Ottoson

Smaller clusters with more flexible time in cluster

Sixth grade teachers should drive the change, from earliest stages

# Concerns remaining about a 6th grade school at Gibbs :

SPECIAL EDUCATION, esp SLC PROGRAMS

Gibbs would need full slate of programs: ELL, Summit, Compass, Reach, Inclusion, Co-taught

Impact on:

Specialist (“out of cluster”) courses & staffing

Extracurricular programs

Staff relationships

Two transitions over two years -- disproportionately affects students with disabilities

Distribution of resources (technology & engineering, music, art)

Possible need for teachers to commute between Gibbs and OMS

# Expansion Committee

Jenna Fernandes, grade 6 English Language Arts

Jack Flood, grade 7 Assistant Principal

Randi Flynn, Special Education Compass Program

Beth Hazzard, grade 6 Mathematics

Julianna Keyes, grade 8 World History

Jason Levy, grade 6 Ancient Civilizations

Heather Mahoney, grade 6 English Language Arts

Judith Packer, grade 8 English Language Arts

Alecia Serafini, grades 6-8 Art

Anne Zachary, grades 6-7 World Languages



## **Town of Arlington, Massachusetts**

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**Adjournment**